

This special threat advisory is intended to provide situational awareness of threats to public order, public safety, and the security of public officials arising from violent online rhetoric opposing new and ongoing public health restrictions (Information current as of 26 January 2022, 1400hrs). The IMCIT continues to maintain visibility on emerging threats and will provide updates as required.

SPECIAL THREAT ADVISORY – UPDATE 1

FREEDOM CONVOY 2022: CONVERGING IN OTTAWA JANUARY 28/29, 2022

KEY POINTS

- Reliable estimates on the number of convoys, vehicles and people arriving in Ottawa for 28/29 January continue to be difficult to obtain. The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) will be reporting the most current substantiated estimates as it becomes available.
- The duration of the event in Ottawa is still unknown. Impromptu protests will likely occur with little or no social media advertising beforehand due to the ability to mobilize a large group of people on short notice.
- The IMCIT assesses that opposition to vaccine mandates continues to grow in intensity and could become a potential flash point for acts of violence. This convoy includes individuals with a range of views, some of which are ideologically motivated in nature and others who are not aligned with any specific ideology or group.

BACKGROUND

In response to the Government of Canada's federal vaccine mandate requiring that all truck drivers crossing the border must be fully vaccinated as of January 15, 2022,¹ a national event entitled "Freedom Convoy 2022" was initiated and planned via a social media fundraiser.² Currently, over five million dollars has been fundraised for the event via the crowdfunding platform GoFundMe.³ Since the convoy began on January 22 in various provinces, it has gained momentum on multiple social media platforms and is slated to arrive in Ottawa between January 28 and 29, 2022.

CURRENT STATUS

Opposition to vaccine mandates for truckers continues to drive discussions and receive widespread promotion within anti-public health order networks. As the date of the convoy's arrival in Ottawa draws closer, coverage of the convoy has been reported on Canadian mainstream media outlets, as well as international news and multiple social media platforms.

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Federal Policing National Intelligence – Ideologically Motivated Criminal Intelligence Team (IMCIT)

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Scope and Scale

It remains unclear how many transport trucks, passenger vehicles and individuals will arrive in Ottawa between January 28 and 29, 2022. The Ontario Provincial Police will be providing the most current numbers to law enforcement partners as information becomes available.

Online advertisements for public order events at various overpasses throughout Ontario have been identified with the intent to support and cheer on the convoys coming from various routes. In addition, local events within Canadian provinces are expected to take place on January 29 in solidarity with the main convoy in Ottawa and could occur at border points or government buildings.^{4 5}

Some social media accounts are claiming trucker support from the United States (US) coming to Ottawa⁶, however at this time, this information appears limited to the online chatter and there has been no information from law enforcement verifying widespread participation from US supporters.

Routes

It is expected that starting, January 28, people will begin to arrive in Ottawa.⁷ At this time, confirmed activities of convoy participants for a January 28 arrival are unknown. On January 29, the majority of convoys will be arriving in Ottawa at 1200hrs, meeting at Parliament Hill from the routes below.⁸

- Cornwall to Ottawa;
- Arnprior to Ottawa;
- Vankleek to Ottawa;
- Kingston to Ottawa; and
- Peterborough to Ottawa.

Intent Once in Ottawa

There is limited information at this time regarding planned activities once the convoy reaches Ottawa, however it is likely impromptu protests will occur with little or no social media advertising beforehand due to the ability to mobilize a large group of people on short notice.

Various traffic disruptions are expected throughout the city as the convoy converges and the potential for impromptu traffic interruptions throughout the National Capital Region are expected for the duration of the convoy which is still currently unknown.

Based on past protests opposing public health orders, it is possible that protected sites such as the Prime Minister's residence and media outlets may be attractive locations for protest. It is possible protesters will seek to identify where the Prime Minister is, based on his itinerary or any open source information posting his location. The potential for some individuals involved in the convoy to attend the Prime Minister's location, should it be a reasonable distance to travel, is possible should his location be publicized. Impromptu shopping events defying public health orders may also occur, given the prevalence of such actions throughout the pandemic.

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The length of time protesters plan to remain in Ottawa is unknown. Social media with narratives to “adopt a trucker” have been identified⁹ and online information indicates that there are individuals willing to provide lodging and meals to convoy participants as a means of support. In addition, part of the fundraising efforts from the GoFundMe campaign are supposed to go towards lodging.¹⁰ Initial information posted online which advertised the link to the fundraiser requested donations for hotels and people to help put drivers up for up to 10 days if needed in Ottawa.¹¹ The overall perception among some supporters and participants of the convoy is that this action will be what is needed to end the perceived overreach of government with respect to mandated vaccines, lockdowns and other public health measures.

General Threats

COVID-19 public health measures and the prolonging of existing restrictions have led to increasingly violent rhetoric appearing online within anti-public health order narratives.¹² The IMCIT assesses that opposition to vaccine mandates continues to grow in intensity and could become a potential flash point for acts of violence.¹³

Recent media reports calling attention to hostile rhetoric among some supporters of the convoy has resulted in one of the main organizers speaking out in opposition of violence.^{14 15} It is important to note that there are a range of people with varying views participating in the convoy and event in Ottawa, ranging from those who are not aligned with any specific ideology or group but have experienced hardships due to COVID-19, to those who are ideologically motivated and see the convoy as an opportunity to further their narratives to a wider audience. Within ideologically motivated networks, not all individuals support extreme activities and there is a diversity of views regarding the use of violence.^a Overall sentiment towards law enforcement is mixed. Some online rhetoric within networks promoting the convoy is indicative of a willingness for a peaceful, lawful protest, in some cases with positive comments directed towards working with police.¹⁶ Conversely, anti-authority narratives have also been observed,¹⁷ including rhetoric that calls for disruptive or violent responses to police enforcement.¹⁸

As the convoy nears Ottawa and continues to receive mainstream media attention, narratives opposing the convoy have also been observed, however, no counter-actions have been identified at the time of this writing.

The IMCIT is liaising with law enforcement partners to maintain visibility on this event and other events related to the opposition of trucker mandates which are occurring nationally, and will provide updates as required.

^a Based on open source information, this convoy will include ideologically motivated individuals with grievances that are anti-government, anti-authority and conspiratorial in nature. Though the purpose of the convoy is not rooted in racially motivated or ethno-nationalist specific grievances, individuals with these views may also be attracted to this event since COVID-19 has amplified existing narratives within these networks. The presence of ideologically motivated individuals does not necessarily mean ideologically motivated criminality or ideologically motivated violence will occur.

Issued by: Ideologically Motivated Criminal Intelligence Team (IMCIT)

Approved by: Director, Directorate of Strategic Intelligence, Federal Policing National Intelligence

¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-truckers-vaccine-reversal-1.6313200>

² <https://www.facebook.com/Freedom-Convoy-2022-100286905896085>

³ <https://www.gofundme.com/f/taking-back-our-freedom-convoy-2022>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/Alberta4Liberty/posts/134919755664374>

⁵ <https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/truckers-opposing-covid-19-vaccine-mandate-plan-weekend-protest-at-n-s-n-b-border-1.5754278>

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=5034569706601284&set=p.5034569706601284&type=3>

⁷ <https://canada-unity.com/bearhug/>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/427304135763931>

¹⁰ <https://www.gofundme.com/f/taking-back-our-freedom-convoy-2022>

¹¹ <https://t.me/fifthnetwork/43>

¹² IMCIT STA 2022-01 – 2022-01-18

¹³ IMCIT NTL #2021-07 -- 2021-12-23

¹⁴ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/organizer-extremists-convoy-no-violence-1.6327650>

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/BlainFMcElrea/posts/10217175102408698>

¹⁶ <https://gab.com/skilledtradejobscanada/posts/107690122297853115>

¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/gsillak/status/1486208349888651266>

¹⁸ <https://twitter.com/SebAnders2020/status/1485976871128944643>